

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00  
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 NRC-05 SOE-02 AID-05  
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L-03 OMB-01 PM-05 OES-07 SP-02 SS-15 STR-07  
TRSE-00 ACDA-12 PA-01 IO-13 DOEE-00 /131 W  
-----043519 081645Z /46

O R 081548Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3735  
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI  
AMEMBASSY OSLO  
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

C O N F I D E N T I A L STOCKHOLM 1792

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, SW  
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER FALLDIN THREATENS TO RESIGN

1. PRIME MINISTER THORBJORN FALLDIN HAS THROWN A SCARE INTO THE THREE-PARTY COALITION GOVERNMENT WHICH HE HEADS BY ANNOUNCING HE IS GIVING SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO RESIGNING. FALLDIN MADE THIS STARTLING DISCLOSURE IN AN INTERVIEW MAY 6 WITH STOCKHOLM DAILY, DAGENS NYHETER.

2. WHY?: THE CATALYST FOR FALLDIN'S UNEXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT WAS SURPRISINGLY NOT THE NUCLEAR ENERGY ISSUE WHICH HAS SO CONSTANTLY PLAGUED THIS GOVERNMENT FROM THE OUTSET. RATHER, IT WAS A SATIRIC ARTICLE OF QUESTIONABLE TASTE PUBLISHED LAST JANUARY IN STOCKHOLM'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AFTERNOON TABLOID, AFTONBLADET. THE ARTICLE PORTRAYED FALLDIN AS AN INMATE OF A MENTAL INSTITUTION TO WHICH HE WAS COMMITTED WHEN HE COULD NOT COME TO TERMS WITH HIS "HONEST FARMER" PUBLIC IMAGE. FALLDIN THEREUPON BROUGHT A LIBEL SUIT AGAINST AFTONBLADET  
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ASKING FOR SYMBOLIC DAMAGES OF ONE KRONER (22 CENTS). ON APRIL 20, A STOCKHOLM COURT RULED THAT THE ARTICLE WAS VALID SATIRE, NOT LIBELOUS, AND THAT FALLDIN WOULD HAVE TO PAY COURT FEES OF SKR 23,000 (US\$5,000). FALLDIN, WHO WAS IN THE US AT THE TIME THE DECISION WAS RENDERED, HAS BEEN PROFOUNDLY DISAPPOINTED BY THE COURT'S ACTION. THE ARTICLE ITSELF, THE COURT'S IMPLIED CONDONING OF SUCH ARTICLES,

AND THE RESULTANT PAIN AND EMBARRASSMENT TO HIS FAMILY HAVE LED THE VERY PRIVATE FALLDIN TO QUESTION THE PRICE OF A CAREER IN PUBLIC LIFE. FALLDIN IS NOT THE FIRST SWEDISH POLITICIAN TO CONFRONT THIS PROBLEM IN RECENT MONTHS. HIS PUBLIC PONDERING OF HIS POLITICAL FUTURE FALLS ON THE HEELS OF A DECISION REACHED LAST JANUARY BY FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PER AHLMARK TO LEAVE POLITICS BECAUSE OF THE IMPOSITIONS IT MADE ON HIS PRIVATE LIFE. IF AHLMARK REACHED HIS DECISION PRIVATELY AND ANNOUNCED IT TO AN UNSUSPECTING PUBLIC, FALLDIN HAS CHOSEN TO AIR HIS THOUGHT PROCESSES OPENLY.

3. PROCEDURES: SHOULD FALLDIN RESIGN, THE SWEDISH CONSTITUTION REQUIRES THAT THE ENTIRE CABINET FORMALLY RESIGN AS WELL. THE PRESENT MINISTERS, HOWEVER, WOULD REMAIN IN CHARGE UNTIL A NEW PRIME MINISTER IS APPOINTED. THE SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT, PRESENTLY HENRY ALLARD (SOC DEM), AFTER DUE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE PARLIAMENT WOULD NOMINATE A CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER. HIS CHOICE, UNDER THE SO-CALLED NEGATIVE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE SYSTEM, MUST NOT MEET WITH MAJORITY OPPOSITION. IF FOUR ATTEMPTS TO APPOINT A NEW PRIME MINISTER FAIL, A NEW ELECTION MUST BE HELD WITHIN THREE MONTHS.

4. REACTION: FALLDIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT CAME AT THE CLOSE OF A HOLIDAY WEEK WHEN MOST POLITICAL FIGURES WERE OUT OF CONFIDENTIAL

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TOWN. NONETHELESS, REACTION HAS BEEN SWIFT, SURPRISING EVEN MR. FALLDIN. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OLA ULLSTEN, WHILE DENYING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S WORK WILL BE AFFECTED, HAS SAID THAT IT IS URGENT THAT FALLDIN REACH A DECISION QUICKLY. EARLY SPECULATION, SHOULD FALLDIN RESIGN, IS TENDING TOWARD DISCOUNTING THE MODERATES AND FOCUSING ON FOREIGN MINISTER KARIN SODER, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY NILS ASLING (BOTH OF FALLDIN'S CENTER PARTY), AND ON OLA ULLSTEN (LIBERAL PARTY). A LIBERAL-SOCIAL DEMOCRAT COALITION IS CONSIDERED OUT OF THE QUESTION BEFORE THE 1979 ELECTION.

5. TIMING: PUBLICATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S DISENCHANTMENT WITH POLITICAL LIFE COMES JUST ONE MONTH BEFORE THE CENTER PARTY CONGRESS IS DUE TO CONVENE ON JUNE 18. FALLDIN SAYS HE WILL HAVE REACHED HIS DECISION BY THEN. RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLL RESULTS SHOW A STEADY DECLINE IN CENTER PARTY STRENGTH, FROM A 24.1 PERCENT TALLY IN THE SEPTEMBER 1976 ELECTIONS TO 18.5 PERCENT TODAY. NONETHELESS, FALLDIN RETAINS THE FIRM SUPPORT OF HIS PARTY'S LEADERSHIP AND ITS RANK AND FILE. HE COULD EXPECT A RINGING ENDORSEMENT OF HIS LEADERSHIP AT THE PARTY CONGRESS. HIS DECISION IS COMPLICATED FURTHER, HOWEVER, BY THE FACT THAT HARD DECISIONS MUST BE

MADE SHORTLY ON NUCLEAR ENERGY SIDE.

6. COMMENT: FALLDIN'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT HAS SEEMINGLY NOT AFFECTED HIS NATURE AS AN ENIGMATIC "FARMBOY" WHO SOMETIMES SEEMS TO PREFER THE PLOW TO POWER. IF HE WERE TO ACTUALLY RESIGN, FM SODER WOULD SEEM TO BE WELL PLACED TO TAKE THE HELM. SHE IS AMONG THE MOST VISIBLE MEMBERS OF THE PRESENT CABINET AND THE MOST POPULAR WITH THE RANK AND FILE OF HER PARTY. ASLING IS CERTAINLY A STRONG CONTENDER. OLA ULLSTEN, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HIS LIBERAL PARTY IS THE JUNIOR PARTNER OF THE COALITION, CANNOT EASILY BE DISCOUNTED EITHER. THE LIBERALS TOOK A SUDDEN LEAP FORWARD UNDER HIS STEWARDSHIP AND HE IS APPARENTLY MORE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL SIDES OF THE POLITICAL

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SPECTRUM THAN WAS HIS PREDECESSOR, PER AHLMARK. NONETHELESS, AT THIS POINT THE EMBASSY WOULD STILL PLACE ODDS ON FALLDIN'S COMPLETING HIS TERM DESPITE HIS PERSONAL INCONVENIENCES AND HIS PUBLIC MUTTERINGS.

KENNEDY-MINOTT

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## Message Attributes

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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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